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C O N F I D E N T I A L KUWAIT 004031

SIPDIS

FOR NEA/ARPI AND G/TIP

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/11/2015

TAGS: PHUM PREL PGOV ELAB KDEM KCRM KU

SUBJECT: TIP UPDATE: MINISTER SAYS GOK WILL "MAXIMIZE EFFORTS AND MINIMIZE TIME" IN IMPROVING TIP CONDITIONS

REF: A. KUWAIT 4007

1B. STATE 163401

1C. KUWAIT 3603

1D. KUWAIT 3412

1E. KUWAIT 3158

1F. STATE 108156

Classified By: Ambassador Richard LeBaron for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

11. (C) The Ambassador met Kuwaiti Minister of Social Affairs and Labor (MOSAL) Faisal Al-Hajji on September 12 that Kuwait to discuss Trafficking in Persons (TIP). He commended Kuwait for the progress made to date, but said even more should be done to address legal protection for expatriate workers, especially domestics, to establish reconciliation centers and shelters, and to prosecute human traffickers. He welcomed the regular dialogue between the DCM and other embassy officers with MOSAL personnel on trafficking and predicted that continued progress would enhance Kuwait's image as an advanced, modern state and set an example for neighboring countries. He further noted Kuwait's booming economy and the many contributions made by foreign workers and encouraged the GOK to acknowledge them by improving their working conditions and legal rights.

"I Have a Duty and I Will Do It"

12. (C) Al-Hajji told the Ambassador the current situation for expatriate workers was unacceptable, and said he had a duty as a both a Kuwaiti citizen and Government official to improve working conditions. Describing the expatriate worker situation as a "mountain that cannot be removed or moved in one day or one month," he said the GOK was serious about improving labor conditions and needed time to execute its plan. The Minister agreed that the goal should be for Kuwait to be a model not just for the Gulf or Arab World, but for the entire Middle East and asserted the GOK would not accept second place. He said he appreciated the U.S. focus on TIP issues as it illustrated real concern about Kuwait and highlighted strong bilateral relations and the ability to talk openly about sensitive matters.

13. (C) Al-Hajji reviewed measures to address TIP, commenting that the inter-ministerial committee under the Council of Ministers, chaired by MOSAL, has been extremely active. As an example, he cited the quick action to reinforce the ban underage camel jockeys. Al-Hajji pointed to the ban on unsheltered summer outside work between noon and 4:00 PM as another success. He reported 80% effectiveness which he attributed to strict enforcement and regular inspections. On the subject of domestic workers, he said while household workers were under the direct authority of the Ministry of Interior (MOI), they were nevertheless the responsibility of the Government of Kuwait and, as a result, MOSAL had an obligation to ensure their safety and well-being. He advised the Ambassador of MOSAL involvement in standardizing contracts for domestic workers, establishing minimum wage guidelines, and clarifying work hours and holidays. The Minister added that the committee was engaging in the shelter issue and taking action, not just studying the matter. Responding to the Ambassador's comment that early GOK intervention was required so that chartering flights and repatriating workers was not the only option, Al-Hajji said that MOSAL was working with the MOI servants' office on dispute mediation.

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